

# Some Interesting Inside Stories of A Big Game That Few People Know About

## HUNTING THE LECTURE LION

BY HENRY P. BOYNTON.

**S**UPPOSING you become a celebrity over night and wake up in the morning feeling yourself famous—

"Sign here, please," says the urbane Cleveland man, whose card reached you prior to the breakfast call.

You are holding in your hand a contract to deliver a series of lyceum lectures.

"At last," you breathe, "I have really arrived."

For scores of men who annually make their marks, the first assurance of established fame comes when the lyceum manager hunts them up. For many a time-worn celebrity, the first hint of failing or forfeited popularity comes when speaking contracts are no longer offered.

Two Clevelanders, Arthur C. Coit and Louis J. Alber, have won world wide standing as connoisseurs in reputations and lion hunters in the field of public endeavor. They have managed or are managing the tours of such men as William Jennings Bryan, Robert LaFollette, William J.

of the decline of eloquence, of the transition from the spoken to the written word, as a vehicle of education and influence. Coit laughs at such phrases and tells you no periodical is growing by such leaps and bounds as the Lyceum business. Lyceum audiences are readers, he says, but they always have time to hear and see directly the man who may be identified with an idea.

In point of people served, money involved and actual influence exerted, the Coit Lyceum bureau takes rank as one of the biggest enterprises in the Sixth City, yet Coit concedes that probably nine Clevelanders out of ten have never heard the name.

Yet the lyceum has a notable history. It started in the exchange of volunteer speakers between New England literary societies, during the thirties. Josiah Holbrook of Middleburyport, Mass., named it from a place in Greece, where Aristotle once spoke. Ralph Waldo Emerson was the first "hired" speaker. He demanded and got \$5 for an address. Later he waxed arrogant with riches and haggled over a \$15 proffer, insisting that a pan of oats for his horse be added to the original offer. The first \$100 fee was paid to Daniel Webster. Beecher added an epoch by demanding and getting \$1,000 a night, more than any lecturer today receives.

Thomas Starr King was the first popular lecturer of the modern school. He defined a lecture as half "sense and half nonsense." Among the more recent professional names of note are those of A. A. Willits, the Apostle of Sunshine, who died last year at ninety-one, after filling sixty consecutive dates in his ninth year, and Ralph Parlette, editor of "The Lyceum Magazine," who lectures 250 times a year and edits his magazine from a car seat. Russell H. Conwell, now preparing for the five thousandth delivery of a lecture which has earned him a cool million, is also worthy of mention. The lecture is "Acres of Diamonds," and the \$1,000,000 has been given away to help poor boys through college. Dr. Conwell has been lecturing actively for fifty-one years.

Albert Edward Wiggam, who gives a startling illustrated scientific lecture on "Heredit, Eugenics and Civilization"; Glenn Frank of Northwestern University, who speaks on "The Good Wrong Man"; Sylvester A. Long of Dayton, Prof. Henry A. Adrian, "The Luther Burbank Man"; Dr. Frank Dixon, a keen thinker and eloquent speaker; Arthur Walwyn Evans, nephew of David Lloyd-George of Great Britain and a great Welsh wit and humorist; Dr. Lincoln Wirt, former U. S. Commissioner of Education to Alaska; John Kendrick Bangs, noted author and humorist, and Robert Parker Miles, former newspaper man and world traveler, are among the most popular of the professional lecturers of the present day lyceum.

"With men who are big enough to fill houses every time they speak, there can be little competition between bureaus, for the only limit on the business done by such men is the number of days they can spare from other duties," says Alber. "So in hunting such celebrities, success resolves itself into a question of favor. The lyceum man must cultivate the acquaintance of his celebrity, must know his thought and preference. Moreover he must tread carefully not to give offence, for statesmen, like prima donnas, are subject to temperament."

"When I first tried to secure J. Hamilton Lewis I nearly lost him through a verbal mis-step. The Illinois senator is a man of rare eloquence and rich enough so that he does not have to lecture. But I had practically secured his consent when he proposed to continue the interview later at his home."

"Where do you live?" I asked. His brow clouded and he replied, "I guess I am not very famous if you don't even know where I live?" I was compelled to outdo myself in assuring him that he was famous before he would renew negotiations."

And the management of a celebrity is not solely a matter of capturing him with a golden bait and the celebrity in his raw state would make anything but a hit. The manager, however, sees possibilities and institutes a rigorous course of coaching. Pet ex-

pressions are ruthlessly cut out, mannerisms are pruned, climaxes built and the method of entrance and exit made the subject of careful drill. Speeches today are scarcely more than half as long as those endured two decades ago and the sequence of thought must be rapid.

Matter as well as manner falls under the scope of the lyceum manager, who is a sort of platform editor. He knows what the people are thinking about. Senators and cabinet members in search of "political thunder" do not scruple to consult him. Often he originates the plan of a lecture and then hunts up the man to deliver it. Coit & Alber have two subjects in mind today, of which the lyceum public will hear, just as soon as they find men capable of embodying the subjects. If the country is thereby inflamed and legislation ensues, they may have their own ideas as to who makes history, but they won't say much about it.

Once in a while a man or woman is so tremendously advertised that temporary platform success is assured, whether or not an iota of speaking talent can be brought to back up notoriety. But such careers are short as a rule. Richmond Pearson Hobson was a happy exception. He won his first engagement as the result of a sensational war feat and in the usual course of events should have dropped from sight in a few months. But he developed great facility as a speaker, almost from the start, and has "come back" on two new issues, naval preparation and national prohibition.

Not always does the lyceum manager hunt. Often he is hunted. On a very recent trip to Washington, Alber feared that the newspaper criticism dealt to Bryan for his adherence to the platform might have made ambitious men timid about signing contracts this year. On the contrary, no sooner was his presence noised about the capital than he was fairly besieged with cards and letters from men who would illumine the understanding of the populace for a con-

sideration. Four senators, three representatives, a vice president and an assistant cabinet member constituted Alber's "bag" for this trip. He might have had a hundred.

The growth and magnitude of the lyceum, with its younger brother, the Chautauqua, is little understood by city people.

Since the latter seventies, booking agents have been regularly employed by lyceum bureaus to arrange for local support in placing talent. About the same time there came into being a sister institution, the Chautauqua, founded at Lake Chautauqua by Bishop Vincent of the Methodist Episcopal church, assisted by Lewis R. Miller, a wealthy manufacturer of Akron. The name was derived from the original meeting place, but today thousands of Chautauquas are held in as many localities.

Perhaps the latest and most economical development is the circuit Chautauqua, in which the bureau picks out entire programs and arranges routes so that each attraction shall appear daily, but at a different point. In this way seven Chautauquas are run at the same time with the same talent, with a separate tent and work crew for each. Eight tents and crews, allowing one day for transit, keep seven towns provided with instruction and entertainment for a week apiece, the remotest outfit moving each day to a new town, exactly like a large game of leap frog.

Why do public men of genuine life and message embark on an enterprise which has so much in common with the circus?

Thomas Starr King was asked the question many years ago and answered, "F-A-M-E."

"Fame?"

"No, fifty and my expenses."

Coit will tell you that half the men who sign contracts with a lyceum bureau do so from a certain amount of financial necessity. But they also welcome the chance to tell the public what is in their hearts. As Judge Landis said: "I have a boy and girl in college and a lot of things in my system I want to get out." Some who do not really need the money devote time to lecturing.

Campaign debts drive dozens of officials to the platform. And just here, says Alber, the lyceum performs one of its most valuable functions. The old fashioned way to pay one's campaign debts was to sell one's soul to a corrupt organization. Even today, no congressman need worry about his campaign debts.

"The lyceum has emancipated scores of public men from corrupt influences by making them financially independent," says Alber. "It has also been a bulwark against malicious publicity. Bryan, for example, is publicity proof. He has met so many million people face to face that nothing any paper can say about him will make a particle of difference to the public."

"I contend that the lyceum is as legitimate a vehicle for public men to gain public attention as the press or the magazine and freer than either of them. It is clean and progressive. We cannot sell the services of men whose reputation is tainted, nor who have won mere notoriety, apart from some genuine idea."

### SOME LYCEUM AND CHAUTAUQUA FIGURES FOR A SINGLE YEAR

Lyceum courses	15,000
Separate engagements	90,000
Aggregate attendance	36,000,000
Separate persons reached	7,000,000
Spent for talent	\$8,650,000
Courses in Ohio	800
Annual engagements in Ohio	5,600
Aggregate attendance in Ohio	2,240,000
Separate Ohioans reached	400,000
Spent in Ohio	\$560,000
Number of Chautauquas	2,800
Chautauqua programs	50,000
Spent for talent	\$6,000,000
Spent for incidentals	\$3,500,000
Ohio Chautauquas	150
Ohio Chautauqua programs	3,000
Cost of Ohio Chautauqua talent	475,000
Individuals reached	400,000

### WHAT THEY GET PER NIGHT

*Bryan	\$250
Defective Burns	500
Marshall	300
LaFollette	300
Murdock	150
Kernon	150
Hobson	150
Hillis	150
Conwell	150
Minimum for man of reputation	100
*Plus half of all above \$500 in the house.	

Burns, Vice President Marshall, Brand Whitlock, Harvey W. Wiley, Victor Murdock, Richmond Pearson Hobson, Edward Bok, Victor L. Berger, Henry Van Dyke, Edward W. Carmack, Henry Watterson, Ian MacLaren and Sam Jones.

The list might be extended to four times the length without using an unfamiliar name.

It is their business to know, to a minute, when a public man is ripe for the lecture platform, when he is identified with some worth-while idea in the minds of his fellow countrymen. When that minute arrives, it's their business to beat all rivals in reaching their man first and most effectively. Sometimes neither the first nor the highest offer wins.

"Take the case of Victor Berger," says Alber. "When he was elected to congress as the first Socialist law maker in the nation, his drawing power was assured, but I was delayed several days before reaching Milwaukee. In the Socialist headquarters where I found him there was a stack of mail that nearly filled a room. One letter that he opened was an offer from a rival bureau to pay him \$200 a night for a lecture series. I told Mr. Berger frankly that the offer was too high. I could not agree to meet it, but I urged him to sign with me at a lower figure. He was friendly but insisted that campaign debts made it imperative for him to accept the highest possible offer."

"Let's ask mother about it," was his final suggestion.

"We went to his home for supper and I met 'mother,' as he always called his wife. In the course of the conversation it developed that she had come from the same little village in Germany where my mother was born. 'Mother' was delighted, as though I were an old friend."

"You shall have the contract and God be with you," broke in her husband. And so I secured a most successful drawing card."

True to their point of view, city journals speak

LOUIS J.  
ALBER



ARTHUR C. COIT

